

# PUBLIC HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE

## The Issue

*The public health infrastructure - the professional workforce, information and data systems, health departments, and laboratories - are Maryland's first line of defense against a wide range of real and potential health threats. Maintenance of an adequate level of readiness is essential for daily new and on going threats to the public's health.*



Our national public health infrastructure is the first, and in many cases, the only line of defense against a barrage of real and potential health threats. Combating the spread of disease and constant environmental and occupational hazards requires a consistent state of readiness. We face the daily presence of new and old microbes in forms of West Nile virus, the increase in multi-drug resistant tuberculosis and staphylococcus infections, and ever increasing chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancers. Even more frightening is the potential for intentional threats to our public health, in the form of the death and destruction that can be caused by bioterrorism with the willful release of infectious agents into whole populations.

Our public health system--the professional workforce, information and data systems, health departments, and laboratories--must be able to sustain ongoing preparedness and vigilance to meet the growing demands of global health threats. At the same time that new technologies have improved transportation and increased the risk of spreading diseases faster, new technologies have also increased our ability to share information and data about those diseases faster than ever before. A 2000 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the nation's public health infrastructure identified gaps in: workforce capacity and competency, information and data systems, and organizational capacities of local and state health departments and laboratories.

The principal public health agencies in Maryland are the State and local health departments. Many additional public and private entities are also involved in providing for the health of all Marylanders. In order to carry out the programs proposed in the Maryland Health Improvement Plan, Maryland's public health infrastructure must identify its weaknesses, build on its strengths and plan for its future capacity. The question becomes, "How will we shape and sustain the public health infrastructure to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?"

**Topics, by jurisdiction, included in the Health Improvement Plan**

**Statewide** - *Improving Access to Health Data and Ensuring an Adequate Public Health Workforce*

**Harford County** - *Public Health Infrastructure*

**Prince George's County** - *Enhancing Infrastructure for Health Planning*

**Priority focus in other jurisdictions**

*Public health infrastructure* is included as a priority area for FY2000 in:

Frederick County • Harford County • Worcester County

**Highlights of HIP strategies recommended to improve the public health infrastructure**

*(for in-depth details, see the complete text of each state and county module)*

- Establish the capacity to monitor and plan for statewide need for public health workers. **(State)**
- Expand the existence and use of distance learning technologies at State and local health departments. **(State)**
- Develop a Report Card of the county's progress to date toward reaching its health care goals. **(Harford County)**
- Complete a formal county-wide needs assessment and establish an on-going needs assessment process through which local health needs and priorities are identified and reflected in the local health improvement plan. **(Prince George's County)**

**Statewide Partners**

Information Resources Management Administration, DHMH • Maryland Association of County Health Officers • Maryland Department of Budget Management, Personnel Division • Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) • Maryland Local Health Departments • Maryland Public Health Association • Office of Health Policy, DHMH • Office of Public Health Assessment, DHMH